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ABSTRACT

A partnership project to develop and demonstrate a model for interagency cooperation between school districts and city governments operated for slightly over a year in Emeryville (California). Successful results of the project included collection of needs assessment data, completion of a social services resource guide, reopening of school playgrounds for afterschool use, and establishment of a child care center. However, the joint planning capability was never institutionalized. Problems occurred in the project implementation, and within the school district and city, that discouraged partnership. Planners of interagency linkage are advised to (1) involve organizations that have a stable governance structure and available staff and can provide the impetus for interagency planning; (2) work on specific, short-term projects that are visable early on and move from there to more general planning; (3) involve community and grassroots groups and informal power brokers as early as possible; and (4) establish interorganizational linkages with elected officials, top management, and lower level staff who have permanent positions. (MLF)

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INTERAGENCY PLANNING:

A CASE STUDY IN MURPHY'S LAW

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This is a cautionary tale.

It seemed like such a good idea at the time. What could be more reasonable, more logical, than to get people from a school district and a city together to assess their needs and to agree on solutions for problems of mutual concern? What if they would have to cross jurisdictional boundaries? What if no one within either the city or the schools had the time or the expertise to engage in systematic planning? Surely the incentives offered would overcome such trifling drawbacks.

There was a federal grant available and the offer of a year of technical assistance, facilitation, and support from experts in two other agencies, who would do all the conceptualizing and the data gathering and all those other good things needed to ensure success.

And so the LINC project was born. The project to develop Local Interagency Needs Assessment Capability, to supply the "missing LINC" in a setting that seemed to need it badly. Bright eyed and full of beans our authors, directors, and production managers (read "expert planners") plunged in to get the show on the road. The script was chosen, major and supporting actors were cast, and a full schedule of rehearsals was drawn up. There was even some fancy planning to avoid or circumvent those tiresome problems with which every production is plagued -- but there was no thought but that it would all come out fine in the end. This was the out-of-town tryout. The project would surely be a winner. With all that good planning, some script revisions, and "a little bit of luck," it ought to play on the Broadway of every project director's desire -- the larger audience of national dissemination of a successful innovation.

And then Murphy stepped in.

You know Murphy -- that ubiquitous chap who proclaims, "If anything can go wrong, it will." He was shortly followed by Oscar, author of the commentary, "Murphy was an optimist." In a word, we never made it past the out-of-town tryouts.

But there are some lessons to be learned from even the most dismal shows. Was it the script? the actors? the setting? If we had it to do over, what would we change? Was there an idea or two that should be salvaged?

And so, abandoning metaphors, I give you a brief account of the LINC project a year after -- what was supposed to happen, what did happen, what went right, what went wrong, what ensued after the project phaseout, and what other planners might learn from our experience.

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

LINC was a partnership project which had as its primary objective to develop and demonstrate a model for interagency cooperation, specifically between school districts and city governments. There were two sub-objectives: to conduct a joint needs assessment for the two major partners, and to increase their capabilities for cooperative planning to meet critical educational and human services needs. The project operated from July 1977 through September 1978, in the city of Emeryville, California

During the life of the project, a four-way partnership was to function, using two county-wide agencies as facilitators and technical consultants. The other two partners were the city government and the school system, which were to develop the capacity for joint planning to meet common needs. The intent was that when the project was completed, the two county agencies would withdraw as active partners, and the city and school district would continue joint planning on a regular basis.

The impetus for joint planning came from the realization that cities and schools in urban areas were facing serious economic and social problems that might better be addressed jointly than individually, in order to use resources more effectively. As a general rule, social service agencies, city governments, and school systems conduct their needs assessments separately in order to establish priorities for allocating resources. Joint interagency planning is not done. Each agency uses its own methods, collecting data appropriate to its own goals and social contexts. The development of a model for joint planning was a new and challenging endeavor.

Another innovative feature was the use of Fault Tree Analysis (FTA), a method used originally in system safety engineering to predict and thereby prevent catastrophic failures in complex systems (Witkin 1977a). Several years ago a colleague and I adapted it for use in evaluating educational and other social systems. The LINC project design included FTA as an integral part of both the project management and the needs assessment. FTA was in a sense invented to circumvent Murphy's Law. How well it worked we shall see later.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES: ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Four agencies participated in the project: (1) the city of Emeryville, (2) Emery Unified School District, (3) Alameda County Training and Employment Board/ Associated Community Action Program (ACTEB/ACAP), and (4) Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE). The school district and the city were the two participants whose needs were being assessed. ACTEB/ACAP and ACOE were responsible for training, advising, management, and technical assistance, with ACOE having prime fiscal and administrative responsibilities.

Emeryville is a city of under 5000 on the east shore of San Francisco Bay, bounded by Oakland and Berkeley. The school district's boundaries are coterminous with those of the city. Each has separate governing boards. ACOE provides direct services to the school district, and ACTEB/ACAP provides technical assistance and other services to 11 cities in the county, including Emeryville.

We chose Emeryville as the project site for two reasons. Although the city is small enough, in both geography and population, to provide a manageable setting, it has many of the characteristics of inner cities in large urban centers, and therefore could serve as a laboratory for joint planning on typical urban problems. Further, the city had already shown an interest in conducting a needs assessment, and thus the groundwork was laid for a natural extension into joint assessment and planning with the school district.

At the time of the project, the city provided no social services to its residents, had no parks or libraries and no child care center. Recreational facilities for the city were supplied by the school district, which has an enrollment of under 600, in two elementary schools and one high school.

The community offered some interesting paradoxes. Although the city was largely industrial, it had one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. Similarly, although the school district's per pupil expenditures ranked in the 99th percentile in the state, its scores on the state testing program were in the lowest five percentiles. The city population was divided about equally between a group of the older residents, mainly poor, blacks and other minorities, and a group of white, middle class residents of a new complex of apartments on the waterfront. Since the apartments were for adults only, most of the school children came from the poorest segment of the population.

Certain relationships among these four agencies had been established prior to the project. In the spring of 1977 the Emeryville city council decided to authorize a needs assessment. Members of the council called upon ACTEB/ACAP, which had already assigned a technical assistance specialist to Emeryville. Meanwhile, I had met several times with the ACTEB/ACAP unit on needs assessment issues. The suggestion was made that joint school-city planning was generally unknown and that this lack offered an important avenue to investigate. Building on the work that had already been undertaken by ACTEB/ACAP, my office wrote a proposal which was shortly approved for funding.

The project was funded by a grant of $32,000 from the Partnership Grant Program of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Other support included a $5000 allocation from the city of Emeryville and extensive inkind contributions from all four partners. The latter consisted of provision of office space and utilities by the school district, and considerable technical assistance, management and personnel services, supplementary clerical help, furniture, equipment, supplies, printing, and postage from ACOE and ACTEB/ACAP.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND MANAGEMENT

I was designated as the LINC administrator, but general management was shared by a Core Team composed of the ACTEB/ACAP technical assistance specialist, a project manager hired for the purpose, and myself. The team was responsible for work plans, initiating and monitoring activities, supervising clerical and research workers, and providing technical expertise. The Core Team met weekly during the first three months, and biweekly or as needed thereafter.

The Core Team was supported by various part-time staff -- clerk-typists, research interns, technical specialists -- most of whose services were contributed by the city, ACOE, and ACTEB/ACAP. They included three CETA employees hired by the city who were allocated to the project.

For higher level policy and decision-making matters, the Core Team was increased to a 12-member Management Team, with representatives from the city council, school board, and the staffs of all four partners. The Management Team met monthly to review work plans and accomplishments, secure facilities and other resources, approve designs and instrumentation for needs assessment, maintain commitments, and formulate the structures for joint planning.

The project maintained active working relationships with the community at large through a Needs Assessment Committee composed of representatives of the city and school district governing boards, commissions and committees, department heads and other staff, and associations representing neighborhoods, industries, and a tenants' group from a large apartment complex. The Needs Assessment Committee (NAC)

began meeting to assess community needs prior to funding of LINC. For the first six months of the project they met weekly or biweekly to assist in various aspects of the needs assessment and to gather information on progress of activities that they could report back to their own groups. They also received training related to needs assessment and interagency planning.

A fourth operational group was an ad hoc committee formed to plan and create a mini-park in the city, which previously had no parks for its residents. This was a joint endeavor in which the school district supplied the land, the city furnished funds, and both contributed ideas and resources for planning. The mini-park committee had members from the LINC management team, school board, city council, city departments concerned, and members of the community.

Activities of LINC were accomplished in three phases: (1) A ready plan, preliminary needs assessment work plan, and a one-day community meeting to establish grass roots concerns were completed in the three months prior to project funding, with time and resources mainly contributed by ACOE and ACTEB/ACAP. (2) Implementation of project objectives was scheduled to take place within a year's span, but three months were added (with no additional funding) to complete major project reports. (3) Post-project activities continued for two months thereafter under the direction of ACOE. Official interagency planning began on September 29, 1977 with a joint city council-school board work session; it ended November 2, 1978, with a second work session for the same elected officials, at which time they reviewed LINC progress and results of the needs assessment and made recommendations for continued joint planning. Due to internal problems facing the two partners, these plans were not implemented.

THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT MODEL

There were no precedents established for a joint assessment of needs between a school district and a city. In order to guide the collection of data, it was necessary to establish a model that would draw on disparate approaches and provide a synthesis useful for guiding decisions for joint planning.

In educational needs assessment, the most common methods used are variations of survey questionnaires and the comparison of student scores on tests with national or state norms or other predetermined criteria. Typically, the questionnaires ask for perceptions of importance of lists of educational goals, objectives, or school conditions, and perceptions of attainment of the goals. Discrepancies between two sets of scale scores on each item are then computed, and items are arranged in order of priority according to the magnitude of the discrepancies.

Aside from serious conceptual and methodological issues arising from such simplistic discrepancy surveys, as well as problems due to over-heavy reliance on test scores or global perceptions of school performance, the usual needs assessment approaches were not appropriate for LINC joint planning because their major concern is the academic needs of students. Although parents and the larger community are encouraged to be a part of the process, and are often interviewed or asked to respond to questionnaires, the focus is always on needs pertaining to the school, not to the school in relationship to the community (Witkin 1977b.)

In contrast, cities and human services agencies tend to use social indicators in needs assessment -- demographic and statistical data that can be collected over

time and that will show trends.* Public opinion polling may also be used, especially to determine the perceived quality of services delivered or the need for more or different services. Although education is often included as one element of the assessment (along with health, safety, and the like), it is usually limited to the educational needs of preschoolers or adults.

Thus, it was seen that needs assessments done independently by a city and a school district would typically differ in the focus of concern, the types of data collected, and the methods used. It would be unusual if such assessments were to uncover needs that could or should be met by joint planning and use of resources, even though such needs might exist.

The data collection plan for the LINC project was designed to synthesize educational and human services delivery approaches to needs assessment. It included social indicators on both the community and the school system, face-to-face interviews with selected business leaders and service providers, a mail questionnaire to key informants, and identification of resources available in nearby communities. Concerns were gathered through meetings of the NAC and other community groups.

Once the major areas of concern and of unmet needs had been identified, it was planned to use causal analyses (FTA) to identify the major barriers preventing the meeting of those needs. FTA was also to be used to help design the structure for ongoing interagency planning.

A general model was developed to guide the data collection. The model also included provisions for continuing needs assessment and planning by using feedback to reconsider concepts, identify new unmet needs, or reanalyze causes of failure to meet critical needs. (For details on the model see Witkin et al., 1979).

JOINT PLANNING CAPABILITY

Concurrently with the gathering of data for needs assessment, the Core Team addressed itself to developing a structure for ongoing joint planning between the school district and the city. We had hoped that linkages of a permanent nature would be established, and that the joint planning process could be incorporated into the organizational structures of the two prime partners. The monthly meetings of the 12-member management team were used partly to explore possibilities for joint planning activities and ways to institutionalize the processes.

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* Recently Robert Rossi and Kevin Gilmartin at the American Institutes for Research in Palo Alto have issued a number of papers on the use of social indicators in educational evaluation, and the American Educational Research Association has formed a Social Indicators Interest Group, with a monthly newsletter. At the time of the LINC project, however, information on social indicators in education was not readily available.

RESULTS

The most successful result of the project was the collection of the needs assessment data. The first city council-school board work session resulted in the identification of over a dozen areas of high mutual concern. These were reduced to five on which to focus indepth needs assessment: employment, education, housing, public safety, and child care. The final data collection included extensive survey and social indicator analyses of child care, education, and employment; mental, physical, and public health, and recreation. Survey data were also collected on city identity, housing, and transportation, and Fault Tree Analyses were undertaken on lack of child care facilities and unemployment of Emeryville residents.

In addition, a resource guide was compiled, indexing and describing dozens of social services available to Emeryville residents in nearby Berkeley and Oakland. Following the publication of the resource directory, the project established a telephone hot line for three months to answer questions from Emeryville residents and to give referrals for social services.

The needs assessment reports and resource directory were compiled by LINC staff and consultants. The only formal joint planning effort between the school district and the city was undertaken to develop the community's first mini-park for children. Once the project focus had been identified, the park was built in a remarkably short time -- about three months from planning to public dedication.

Informal cooperative efforts initiated by the NAC also paid off in concrete action. For example, the district had closed off playgrounds after school hours, due to lack of money to pay supervisory staff. Children were climbing over the fences, getting hurt, and causing disturbances. A small committee of concerned NAC members asked the city council for funds to keep the playgrounds open, since there were no other recreation sites in the city at that time. The council appropriated funds, two community members were hired, and the school district supplied the general supervision.

The impetus of LINC also stimulated the city to apply for a grant to set up a badly needed child care center, cooperating with the school district on the site. The application was made before the child care FTA was completed, and therefore did not reflect some of the critical parameters that emerged from the analysis. Nevertheless, the center was funded, and was in operation by the time the project was ended.

At their final joint work session the school board and city council reviewed the needs assessment data and fault trees, heard recommendations from the project staff and engaged in some structured activities to help them set priorities for action. The results: a decision to continue joint planning, adding the city's Industries Association as a third partner, with a focus on reducing local unemployment and better preparing youth for the world of work. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for January 1979.

Nothing came of that decision. By January both the city and the school district, which had undergone traumatic dislocations of various kinds throughout the project, were facing political and operational problems that fully engaged their attention. The joint planning capability was never institutionalized, and the LINC appeared to sink without a trace.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

The influence of Murphy's law came in two forms: those things that went wrong with the project implementation per se, and those events which occurred within the school district and the city which were internal to their operations, but which impinged on the project and effectively put an end to any hopes for a continued partnership. A brief summary of some of the problems follows:

- During the first three months of the project, the city governance structure underwent a major reorganization. The position of city manager was abolished and new departments were created, with department heads forming an administrative cabinet that reported to the city council. At the same time, the school district was undergoing personnel changes, losing an administrative assistant to the superintendent who had previously performed important liaison functions with the project. These changes necessitated revisions in the interrelationships among the four LINC partners, and the establishment of new lines of communication with project management, causing a four month delay.

- There were three project managers: the first became ill after four months, the second was injured after three months, and the third manager was abruptly reassigned by her agency to another project, but later returned part time.

- The project office was moved three times. The project office space was cramped and noisy. Office equipment had to be rented, which contributed to unanticipated costs.

- The school superintendent was involved in a widely publicized legal battle involving a former teacher and failed to attend many meetings. There was no other district-level administrator to replace him.

- The loss of high school accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges occupied the attention of school officials for several months.

- The high school principal became ill in the fall, delaying the high school data collection.

- Efficient half-time clerical assistance could not be located.

- CETA employees required extensive supervision to complete the assigned tasks, detracting from other project activities and adding to the load on the project manager.

- Although a search was begun early for two university graduate students to join the project as research interns for the data collection, qualified and willing candidates were not located for six months. The needs assessment had to be compressed within a three month period at the end of the project. One intern could not complete her report, and it was finished by the ACTEB/ACAP Technical Assistance Unit.

- The project closing date had to be extended three months in order to complete needs assessment activities and reports.

- The number of FAULT TREES that were completed had to be reduced from five to two, due to unanticipated costs and time requirements. The skills and time required to construct the trees and complete the analyses were far in excess of what the participants could provide.

- The management team lost its city council member after six months and never gained a replacement. This seriously hampered getting high level input and support from the city.

- School administrators made all sorts of excuses to thwart gathering crucial educational data. The final assessment was heavily skewed toward analysis of city needs, with gaping omissions in the school-based data.

WHY THINGS WENT WRONG

There were striking geographical, sociological, and economic factors operating in the city and the district which made it appear that the setting would be just dandy for an experiment in interagency planning. What we had was a microcosm, almost a laboratory situation -- a small urban inner city enclave that operated like a remote rural area in many respects. It had large problems, but small and (we thought) manageable organizations.

This felicitous combination blinded us to cues that should have alerted us to the pitfalls awaiting LINC, conditions existing prior to the project:

- Unstable organizational structures and personnel. The school district had had some five superintendents in 10 years and little continuity in management. As for the city, we knew that it was considering a reorganization plan, but we did not know the details.

- Use of external consultants instead of staff. Both the city and school district typically retained consultants to perform tasks that should normally have been done inhouse. Therefore, there was no staff available to do planning. This way of operating carried over to LINC, in that they expected that we would do all the needs assessment and planning tasks, and that their own staffs would be involved only minimally.

- Inadequate funding. Many project tasks had to be carried out by CETA employees with inadequate skills, volunteers, and part time professional help. We set objectives that were in some respects wildly unrealistic, given the level of funding and staffing.

- Lack of mutual trust and communication. There was considerable suspicion between important figures connected with the schools and the city. Furthermore, the school superintendent and the president of the school board were scarcely on speaking terms.

Many things went wrong that we could not have foreseen. As soon as the project was funded and we realized the problems that were arising due to the reorganization of the city's governance structure and the various upheavals in the school district, we took several steps. We did some failure predictions on project management, and attempted to set up alternatives and backup systems. We explored new lines of communication with the city staff, since the major supporters of the project (the city

manager and his assistant) were gone after three months. And we endeavored to anticipate problems in building the joint planning capability.

All these efforts were only partially successful. As the year wore on we found ourselves reeling from one crisis to another. In spite of it all, we did complete the major objectives, produced volumes of needs assessment reports, and demonstrated that interagency planning on specific issues could yield very good results in a short time frame.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER PLANNERS

In the year since the project was terminated I have found a few reports of other interagency linkages and have talked with people in human services planning who know about some informal efforts along these lines. Although the LINC setting had peculiar and possibly unique characteristics, there seems to be evidence that Murphy's Law might be circumvented to some extent by keeping the following in mind.

1. The organizations involved should have a stable governance structure, with continuity of management for some time.

2. The agencies should have staffs large enough so that people can be assigned specifically to the tasks involved in the interagency planning, whatever they are. Banathy (1978) points out that "If personnel are operating at peak level simply to meet the basic survival needs of the organization, they may balk at being asked to assume an additional work load to effect linkage, unless the linkage process or program itself actually eases the work load necessary for maintenance."

3. In order to institutionalize the process, interorganizational linkages should be established on at least three levels: (1) with elected officials, (2) with top management, and (3) with lower level staff who have permanent positions. Although the actual work will probably be accomplished at the third level, it is essential to get official support, understanding, and active involvement at the highest levels (Banathy 1978).

4. As early as possible, identify the informal power brokers operating, and get them involved in supporting the interagency efforts. These people are often <u>not</u> elected or appointed officials. They can find resources, give good advice, and help or hinder your efforts. (For starters, we should have been getting the city clerk and police chief actively engaged with LINC.)

5. Success is more likely if you work on specific, short term projects and issues and move from there to more general planning, rather than starting with a planning structure and working down to specifics. This goes against the grain with many planners. Our experience has been verified in other places -- for example, the highly successful Metro plan in Seattle and adjoining communities, which started with the specific task of cleaning up water pollution; the informal planning between the city and school district which occurs in Monrovia, California; and recent reports from Scottsdale, Arizona, where interagency cooperation is occurring in use of data processing services. The community education movement in many cities has also been successful in getting community use of surplus school facilities and initiating other school-community cooperative efforts.

6. Success is probably more assured when the impetus for interagency planning comes from one of the prime partners, rather than from outside, as it did on the LINC project. However, it is often necessary to have a third party act as facilitator to the joint planning efforts until linkages and processes have been firmly established (Banathy 1978).

7. Visible products are necessary early on in order to maintain interest. Although a great deal of energy went into the data gathering for the needs assessment that we would have preferred channeling directly into joint planning activities, those needs assessment reports were necessary in order to establish credibility and to provide incentive for continued efforts.

8. Involve community and grass roots groups as early as possible and keep them interested. As long as our community-based Needs Assessment Committee met regularly, interest was high and the members initiated many informal liaisons that resulted in specific action benefiting both the city and the schools. When meetings became less frequent and finally stopped, because of excessive demands on the LINC staff time, that initiative was irretrievably lost.

   Such groups should do what they are best suited for, however. Many city planners feel that community groups and citizen organizations can assist with technical questions, data collection, and professional expertise on needs assessment and social planning efforts (League of California Cities 1975). We found, however, that our NAC members felt most comfortable with providing communication linkages and general community support for the project. Although we had planned that the NAC would help with data collection through conducting interviews and assisting with fault tree construction, those efforts were not successful. We did train some of them to provide judgments that were used in the quantification process of the two fault trees.

9. If joint planning is undertaken on a programmatic scale, there should be two kinds of staffs involved -- one for data collection and technical aspects, such as needs assessment, and one to facilitate meetings and planning processes. Technical and facilitator roles are very different, and there should be trained people available to do both.

The concept of interagency planning among social service agencies has been gaining acceptance in the last few years, but it is still very new and not widely implemented. Models for ongoing, formal interagency planning between schools and cities are almost nonexistent. Recently, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development published a model for interorganizational linkage which grew out of a research project in environmental education (Banathy 1978). Although the guide does not address specifically some of the problems to be encountered in a school system-city government context, it has many useful concepts as well as instructions for preparing for and instituting interagency linkages.

THE MISSING LINC ONE YEAR LATER

One year after termination of the project, there is evidence of continued informal interaction among many of the groups involved in LINC, including increased cooperation between the Neighborhood Improvement Associations and the Industries Association.

Also, based on the needs highlighted by LINC, the city itself funded a job development and placement element in its Job bank, which had previously been limited to training.

The child care center and mini-park are operating, and the needs assessment data base and resource directory are available to substantiate funding requests. LINC also demonstrated successful processes for public, focused work sessions with a school board and city council.

In addition, the external consultant who developed the city's reorganizational plan (and who later acted as a management consultant to the school district) reviewed the LINC reports and made specific recommendations to the city council, addressing the areas of greatest unmet need in the field of human services.

Since Murphy and his cohorts continued to strike, these recommendations have never been implemented. The community is still reeling from a series of blows that occurred following the project phase-out. Among the developments:

- The school superintendent was fired and there is as yet no replacement. The district is being run by the two elementary school principals acting as joint superintendents.

- Due to a community uproar over a condominium conversion, two city council members lost their seats in a recall. Both of them had been staunch supporters of LINC and interagency planning. The city council now has only three members and a suit has been filed contesting the recall election.

- The chief of police served briefly on the school board, long enough to help get the district's accreditation back. He then resigned, leaving a power vacuum.

- Due to loss of revenues following Proposition 13, the school district dismissed the recreation director, who had been the only staff member actively involved in the interagency planning. The district now wants the city to assume responsibility for recreation, but the city refuses to do so. I recently offered to bring in a consultant (who had worked with the project earlier) to facilitate some dialogue and joint planning to meet this immediate need, as well as to consider what could be done on the serious unemployment and vocational education issue. But the staff persons concerned were not interested, and this is no time to approach the council and school board.

In short, although there is a crying need for continued joint planning to solve critical problems of mutual concern, the persons who should be most supportive of such an effort are apparently too overwhelmed by current crises to take the necessary steps.

There are some people who believe that in a year or so the political and organizational situations will stabilize and that the climate will then be right for picking up the joint planning efforts. In the meantime, battered but unbowed, those of us who tried to supply the missing LINC are learning what we can from this cautionary tale.

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